**The Plot, Themes, Setting & Structure**

Philip Gwynne’s *Deadly, Unna?*  is the story of two young boys as they come to terms with the realities of racism in regional South Australia. Set in the Port, a small, sleepy, coastal town on the York Peninsula during the 1970’s, the plot follows the narrator Gary “Blacky” Black and his friends as they deal with life in a small country town.

Blacky is in many ways a typical fourteen year old kid from the country. He comes from a large family, goes squidding with his best mate Pickles, is self-conscious about his appearance, and plays football for the local team. Like most boys his age, he plays football, worries about what to say to girls, shirks responsibility and has problems at home.

Blacky – a “Goonya” - (who is white) lives in the Port (where the whites live) and gradually develops a (best) friendship with Dumby Red - a “Nunga” - (an Indigenous boy) from the Point (an Aboriginal Mission near the Port) who plays football for the same side as Blacky. Nungas and Goonyas don’t mix except in the local football team. Dumby is confident and athletic, excels at football, and has a “killer smile”. The two boys are opposites, right down to the colour of their skin. It is because of this brief friendship that Blacky begins to question some of the attitudes and values of his small town and learns important lessons about human dignity, racism, justice, death, courage, family and friendship.

The novel is divided into two sections: Winter and Summer. In winter, in the football team, the short friendship between Blacky and Dumby develops and Blacky begins to see and resent the racism in his community. In summer, he is smitten by the camper, Cathy, and in his desire for her approval, he forgets his Nunga friends.

The first section of the novel, ‘Winter’, sees Blacky spend much of his time dodging responsibility. This section opens with Blacky worried about the imminent grand final and the responsibility he carries as the team’s new first ruck. The section ends with the football Grand Final, in which Blacky unwittingly becomes the hero.

The events of the Grand Final begin to act as a catalyst as Blacky begins noticing the ways in which discrimination and disadvantage of Indigenous people are present around him.

The second section of the text, ‘Summer’, shows us that Blacky understands the importance of making a stand and is able to do so. This ‘Summer’ section of the novel reaches a climax when Dumby is tragically killed after he is involved in an armed robbery and Blacky must decide whether to obey his father or to go to Dumby’s funeral.

Blacky’s determination to attend Dumby’s funeral marks a turning point. He knows his actions will put an end to his blossoming friendship with Cathy and bring the full weight of his father’s rage upon him. Nevertheless, he does get to the funeral and the experience gives him the courage to make a further stand. Blacky’s brothers and sisters join him in his stand; it is clear when he and his siblings paint over the ‘BOONGS PISS OFF’ graffiti, how much he has matured. He is standing up for something important. Although he knows that he can’t change the attitudes of the Port overnight and the slogan may well reappear, he also knows he has at last taken responsibility for something he *can* change, ‘not forever, but for tonight anyway’.

The novel ends with Blacky at peace with himself, happy in his relationship with his siblings, and confident that he will be able to deal with the problems that will come with the morning.

*Deadly, Unna?*  is a teenager’s view of his family, friends and home town. It is also a rite of passage, as Blacky confronts the attitudes which have shaped the community around him and comes to his own decisions about the path in life he will follow.